

**The Music of  
Jörg Widmann**

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Jörg Widmann, working on his opera *Babylon*  
(Photograph © Marco Borggreve)

## Preface

Jörg Widmann, the most successful among Germany's composers of the younger generation, celebrated his fortieth birthday in the summer of 2013. Given that he has already accumulated an extensive work catalogue, performances and recordings with world-class musicians, and numerous awards, this birthday offers a welcome occasion for a first appraisal of his creative output. Regrettably, the fact that he is a musician with many talents can only be mentioned cursorily here. It is well known that he is acclaimed worldwide as a stellar solo clarinetist. More recently, he is also beginning to make a name for himself as a conductor: he often directs performances of his own compositions and, in the summer of 2011, has accepted the position of Principal Guest Conductor with the Irish Chamber Orchestra. Last but not least, he proves himself a passionate music pedagogue in his dual appointment as professor of clarinet and composition at the Music Academy of Freiburg in Southwest Germany, in lectures, and in creative workshops with children and teenagers.

The compositions described in this study—one solo sonata, nine works of chamber music, three works each for larger ensembles and for symphony orchestra, and two operas—account for only about a quarter of Widmann's output as it stands in mid-2013, but may nonetheless be considered representative for its variety and breadth. The five chapters into which this book is divided mirror his focal points of interest. At the interface of poetic language and instrumental sound he is fascinated both by responses to poetic texts in the medium of absolute music (I) and by an orchestra's ability to imitate vocal genres (II). Those who know him primarily as a performer will be surprised that the instruments for which he confesses he most enjoys writing are the bowed strings (III); but just as multi-colored and imaginative is his writing in compositions that involve his own instrument, the clarinet, particularly since he combines or contrasts it with ever different musical partners (IV). Finally, his works for the music-dramatic stage, which have developed from chamber-music scoring to full-scale operas and turn out to interpret their librettos both vocally and instrumentally, can be understood as a kind of synthesis of his various musical interests and intents (V).

This book has received valuable input from various persons, to whom I extend my heartfelt thanks. Yvonne Stern-Campo, composer manager at Schott Music in Mainz, promptly and unbureaucratically answered my many wishes for scores, review clippings, and recordings. Katrin Beck and her Munich office for cultural management coordinated the meetings between composer and author and gave competent advice for the list of prizes and awards. Kristen Castellana, director of the music library at the University of Michigan, supported my research by providing additional materials and purchasing commercial recordings of Widmann's works. Meinolf Wewel generously allowed me to use, for the fifth time in so many years, one of his photo collages for the book cover. To the first reader of the complete manuscript, Gerhold Becker, I owe heartfelt thanks for numerous clarifications and constructive criticism. Special thanks go to Jörg Widmann himself, who carefully read the entire text including all music examples, commented extensively in several long conversations, and added some important details. Responsibility for any inaccuracies that may remain is, of course, mine alone.

Ann Arbor, Michigan, September 2013  
Siglind Bruhn



On the music examples in the following chapters: Widmann has his scores printed with accidentals that are only ever valid for a single note. In all cases of tone prolongations by way of a tie or an immediate note repetition, the result may look unfamiliar. Nonetheless, the excerpts set for this study retain this consistent reiteration of accidentals wherever space allows.